



Salmon habitat restoration project is underway on the Merced River

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As part of its decades-long commitment to environmental stewardship, Merced Irrigation District has broken ground on a project to restore an additional half mile of Merced River salmon-rearing habitat below Lake McClure.

In total, the **Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project** consists of re-grading and enhancing more than 7-acres of riparian and upland habitat. It also involves enhancement of approximately 1.7-acres of salmonid spawning habitat; 3.9-acres of seasonally inundated juvenile rearing habitat; and approximately 13-acres of the Merced River channel.

The Project is located approximately 1,400 feet downstream of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Merced River Salmon Hatchery. Funding for the \$2.27 million project has been provided by MID, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The restoration project is the latest in a string of rehabilitation efforts along a 4-mile stretch of key salmon spawning and rearing habitat between Crocker Huffman diversion dam and the community of Snelling.

Between the early and mid-1900s, a significant stretch of the Merced River was critically damaged by state-sanctioned private gold dredge mining. The mining resulted in cobble and gravel from the river being strewn for several miles, eliminating crucial spawning habitat. It also decimated the shallow riparian habitat used by juvenile salmon before migrating downstream toward the ocean.

In recent years, approximately 1.25 miles of the river section have been restored through various projects. The current **Instream and Off Channel Habitat Restoration Project** will bring the total to 1.75 miles of restored river. Additionally, another 0.25 river miles above Henderson Park has been approved for restoration funding by the California Department of Water Resources. Upon completion of both projects, approximately half of the river stretch between Crocker Huffman Dam and Snelling will have been restored.

“This is in line with our environmental stewardship intentions and helps support the salmon lifecycle within our region,” said MID General Manager John Sweigard. “We have maintained for years that we want to do our part – within our sphere of influence – to address the needs of salmon and that’s exactly what we are doing.”

As part of the project, approximately 65,000-cubic yards of material will be excavated and sorted from dredger tailing piles including floodplain re-contouring and side channel creation. Approximately 38,500-cubic yards of native gravel and cobble will be used to enhance and establish gravel bars and salmonid spawning riffles. The gravel and cobble will also be placed in select areas in the main channel to create 1.7-acres of salmonid spawning habitat and increase the water surface elevation in order to facilitate inundation of newly created floodplain and side channel habitat.

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